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ABSTRACT

Examined were differences in satisfaction with parenthood among 125 primiparous, middle-class, working and non-working women above and below 30 years of age who completed multiple-choice questionnaires within 6 months of the birth of their child. Questions pertained to responsive attitudes toward infants, attitudes toward women's roles, and adjustment to parenthood. Findings indicated that working mothers differed from homemakers on dimensions of adjustment. Breast feeding was found to be related to satisfaction with parenthood among non-working mothers and bottle feeding was associated with satisfaction among working mothers. Among bottle-feeding mothers, older mothers were more satisfied than younger mothers if they worked, and younger mothers were more satisfied than older mothers if they did not work. Older mothers endorsed more female role values that were less traditional than did younger mothers. Mothers who did not work and held non-traditional role values were least satisfied with parenthood. Non-working older mothers having non-responsive attitudes toward infants were less satisfied with parenthood than were others. The most satisfied mothers in the sample worked outside the home and held strong traditional role values. It was unclear whether older, non-traditional or non-infant-centered homemakers derive less satisfaction when deprived of the stimulation and ego-gratification of work, or whether certain unmeasured personality variables contribute to a failure to embrace rewarding roles. Tables are included. (RH)

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Employment Status and Adjustment in Mothers Who Delay Parenthood
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ABSTRACT

Pursuit of educational and career advancement have contributed to a trend to delay parenthood among educated, middle class women. More than half of mothers continue to work outside the home after they begin their families. Preparational experiences and attitudes may render the experience of motherhood different for those who delay parenthood and those who do not. This study examined differences between working and non-working women above and below the age of 30 in their satisfaction with parenthood.

The sample consisted of 125 middle class primiparous mothers who completed multiple-choice questionnaires within 6 months of the birth of the child. Questions pertained to responsive attitudes toward infants, attitudes toward women's roles, and adjustment to parenthood.

All of the women had been employed prior to the birth of the child but only 40% were employed at the time of contact. Most believed that they would return to work at some time in the future.

A confirmatory factor analysis was used to derive scales that were then entered as dependent variables in multivariate analysis of variance with Newman-Keuls post-hoc multiple comparisons.

Mothers who worked outside the home differed from homemakers on dimensions of adjustment. Breast feeding was found to be associated with satisfaction with parenthood among non-working mothers and bottle feeding was associated with satisfaction among working mothers. Among bottle-feeding mothers, older mothers were more satisfied than younger mothers if they worked and younger mothers were more satisfied than older mothers if they did not work. The older mothers were found to endorse less traditional female role values than the younger mothers.

Mothers who did not work and who also held non-traditional role values were least satisfied with parenthood. Mothers who were older, who did not work and who did not hold responsive attitudes toward infants were also less satisfied with parenthood. The most satisfied mothers in the sample worked outside the home and held strong traditional role values.

It is unclear whether older, non-traditional or non-infant-centered homemakers derive less satisfaction when deprived of the stimulation and ego-gratification of work or whether certain unmeasured personality variables contribute to a failure to embrace rewarding roles.

Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Baltimore, Maryland, April 23-26, 1987.

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STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESES

1. Factors associated with adjustment to parenthood will differ for working and non-working mothers.
2. Factors associated with adjustment to parenthood will differ for women aged 30 and over (older mothers) and women under 30 (younger mothers).
3. Attitudes toward the baby will contribute differently to adjustment in working and non-working mothers and in older and younger mothers.
4. Attitudes toward motherhood and toward women's roles will contribute differently to adjustment in working and non-working mothers and in older and younger mothers.

METHODOLOGY

Sample: 125 adult middle class primiparous mothers completed multiple choice questionnaires regarding the transition to parenthood, responsive attitudes toward infants, attitudes about women's roles, and enjoyment of the infant's early months of life. Mothers had delivered the first child within the six months prior to participation in the study.

Mean maternal age was 28 (range: 19-40).

Mothers were divided into 2 groups.

Mothers aged 19 - 29 were termed younger mothers.

Mothers aged 30 - 40 were termed older mothers.

Group differences were not found between mothers aged 19 - 24 and 25 - 29 or between mothers aged 30 - 34 and 35 - 40.

Mean infant age was 3 months (mode: 2 months).

50% were male. 50 % were female.

All infants were full-term with no significant health problems.

51 mothers worked outside the home.

74 mothers did not work outside the home.

All mothers had worked in the past.

Most mothers planned to work in the future.

Instrument:

The questionnaire was submitted to a confirmatory, oblique multiple groups factor analysis.
8 scales resulted.

Alpha coefficients ranged from .61 - .90
(mean = .74).

Data Analysis:

Two-way and three-way multivariate analysis of variance was performed with the independent variables maternal age, maternal work status, and method of feeding the baby. Scales measuring responsiveness to the infant and female role values were dichotomized to form independent variables. Dependent variables were scales measuring satisfaction with parenthood and enjoyment of early infancy.

Significant results were further tested with the more conservative a posteriori multiple comparison of means tests using the Student Newman-Keuls procedure.

RESULTS

I. MOTHER'S WORK STATUS AND METHOD OF FEEDING THE INFANT

A. Work Status

Working mothers were more satisfied with parenthood than non-working mothers ($F(1,123) = 6.514, p < .01$).

B. Method of Feeding the Infant

1. Breast feeding mothers held more responsive attitudes toward infants than bottle feeders ($F(1,123) = 11.484, p < .005$).
2. Breast feeding mothers considered the infants' first months to be more difficult than did bottle feeding mothers ($F(1,123) = 4.882, p < .02$).

C. Role Satisfaction, Work Status and Method of Feeding the Infant (See Table 1)

1. Working mothers who bottle fed their infants were more satisfied with parenthood than those who breast fed ($F(1,49) = 5.637, p < .02$).
2. Working mothers who bottle fed considered the infant's first months to be less difficult than those who breast fed ($F(1,49) = 11.584, p < .001$).
3. Non-working mothers who breast fed their infants were more satisfied than those who bottle fed their infants ($F(1,72) = 3.806, p < .05$).
4. Non-working mothers who breast fed did not differ from those who bottle fed in estimation of difficulty of infant's first months.

Summary:

Mothers combining work and mothering roles derived the greatest maternal role satisfaction. Although the choice to breast feed the infant was associated with infant-centered, responsive attitudes, it also contributed to the perception of mothering a young infant as difficult. Of mothers who remained at home, breast feeding was associated with increased maternal role satisfaction but not with increased difficulty. However, among multiple role holders (work and mothering), breast feeding was associated with greater dissatisfaction and perception of early infancy as difficult.

II. MATERNAL AGE AT FIRST BIRTH

A. Maternal Age and Feeding Method (See Table 2)

1. Bottle feeding mothers:
 - a. older working mothers were more satisfied with parenthood than were younger working mothers ($F(1,11) = 5.030, p < .04$).
 - b. older non-working mothers were more dissatisfied with parenthood than were younger non-working mothers ($F(1,17) = 12.436, p < .002$).
2. Breast feeding mothers did not differ along this dimension

B. Orientation Toward Female Role Values

1. Older working bottle feeding mothers endorsed less traditional female role values than their younger counterparts ($F(1,11) = 5.559, p < .05$).
2. Non-working mothers with less traditional role values were the least satisfied with parenthood ($F(3,121) = 3.332, p < .02$). (See Table 3)

C. Orientation Toward the Infant

Older, non-working mothers with less responsive attitudes toward infants were more dissatisfied with parenthood than those with more responsive attitudes ($F(7,117) = 2.855, p < .008$). (See Table 4).

Summary:

Maternal age interacted with maternal work status in contributing to role satisfaction only in bottle feeding mothers. The relationship between breast feeding and responsiveness to infants may obscure age effects. Among bottle feeders making the less infant-centered choice, combining work with motherhood appeared to increase the likelihood of maternal role satisfaction in women aged 30 and over. This may have been due to their less traditional definitions of the female role. Women who did not have strong orientations toward traditional female roles and who did not have strong orientations toward an infant-centered approach to mothering were less satisfied if they were not multiple role holders.

CONCLUSIONS

First time mothers of infants in this study were more satisfied with parenthood if they were employed outside the home, particularly if they made compromises such as bottle feeding the infants.

Breast feeding in this study was strongly related to infant-centered, responsive attitudes and may obscure the complex relationship between maternal age, work status and adjustment to parenthood. Among women who expressed their commitment to the infant through the demanding activity of breast-feeding, age was not a factor in successful adaptation. It should be noted that all mothers who had attempted breast feeding or who combined breast and bottle feeding methods were included in the breast feeding group. Among mothers who may have had a more ambivalent commitment to motherhood as manifested through bottle feeding, less responsive attitudes, and a weaker orientation toward traditional female role values, older mothers were most dissatisfied when they were not employed. Perhaps older mothers suffered most from the loss of self-esteem, identity and gratification obtained through work.

The most satisfied group was those women who were older, working and bottle feeding their infants. These women may have benefited most from holding two satisfying roles while taking steps to reduce role overload. The least satisfied were those older mothers with incomplete commitments to both work and motherhood. For them, the experience of a work identity may have been necessary for well-being.

Alternatively, this group may have been lacking a strong commitment to either the mothering or the work roles. It would be of interest to ascertain whether a constellation of personality variables leads to a failure to embrace rewarding roles, and whether the addition of the work role in the women's lives would enhance satisfaction with mothering.

Table 1

Mean Scale Scores for Maternal Work Status and Method of Feeding Infant

	Breast Feeders	Bottle Feeders	Source	(SS)	(MS)	F	P
Workers Dissatisfaction	3.8005	4.0974	Between Within Total	.8540 7.4241 8.2781	.8540 .1515	(1,49) 5.637	.02*
Non-Workers Dissatisfaction	3.7199	3.4472	Between Within Total	1.0502 19.8660 20.9162	1.0502 .2759	(1,72) 3.806	.05
Workers Dislike Infancy	2.8158	3.6923	Between Within Total	7.4418 31.4798 38.9216	7.4418 .6424	(1,49) 11.584	.001*
Non-Workers Dislike Infancy	2.9727	3.0526	Between Within Total	.0902 62.6565 62.7466	.0902 .8702	(1,72) .104	N.S.

*Student Newman-Keuls significant at the .05 level

Table 2
Mean Dissatisfaction with Parenthood for Two Levels of
Maternal Age at Two Levels of Work Status for
Breast and Bottle Feeding Mothers

	Maternal Age		Source	(SS)	(MS)	F	P	
	19-29	30-40						
Workers:								
breast	3.8523	3.7293	Between	.1401	.1401	(1,36)	.936	N.S.
			Within	5.3865	.1496			
			Total	5.5265				
bottle	3.9282	4.3681	Between	.5954	.5954	(1,11)	5.030	.04*
			Within	1.3021	.1184			
			Total	1.8976				
Non-Workers:								
breast	3.6833	3.7951	Between	.1512	.1512	(1,53)	.601	N.S.
			Within	13.3295	.2515			
			Total	13.4807				
bottle	3.6724	2.8167	Between	2.6976	2.6976	(1,17)	12.436	.002*
			Within	3.6877	.2169			
			Total	6.3853				

*Student Newman-Keuls significant at the .05 level

Table 3

Mean Dissatisfaction with Parenthood for Two Levels of Maternal Work Status
and Two Levels of Traditional Role Identification

	<u>Maternal Work Status</u>		Source	(SS)	(MS)	F(3,121)	P
	Workers	Non-Workers					
Greater Traditional Role Identification	3.9645*	3.7135	Between	2.3454	.7818	3.332	.02*
			Within	28.3951	.2347		
			Total	30.7405			
Lesser Traditional Role Identification	3.8144	3.5392*					

*Student Newman-Keuls significant at .05 level

Note: "Traditional Role Identification" was derived by performing a median split on the "Maternal Role Definition" Scale.

A lower score denotes stronger identification with traditional feminine values.

Table 4

Mean Dissatisfaction with Parenthood for Two Levels of Maternal Age
at Two Levels of Work Status and Two Levels of Responsiveness to Infant

		Maternal Age		Source	(SS)	(MS)	F(7,117)	P
		19-29	30-40					
Workers:	Greater Responsiveness	3.9059	3.9055	Between	4.4854	.6408	2.855	.008*
			Within	26.2551	.2244			
			Total	30.7405				
	Lesser Responsiveness	3.8225	3.8492					
Non-Workers:	Greater Responsiveness	3.8755	3.8322					
	Lesser Responsiveness	3.5644	3.3098*					

*Student Newman-Keuls significant at .05 level

Note: The "Responsiveness Towards Infant" variable was derived by performing a median split on the Responsiveness scale.

A score of 1 denotes a value above the median, 2 denotes a value below the median.